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OCTOBER

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1873

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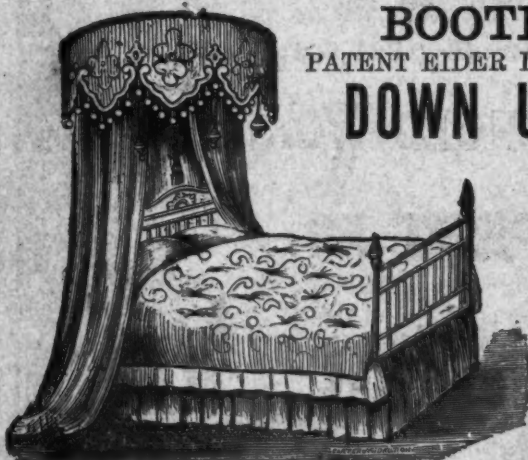
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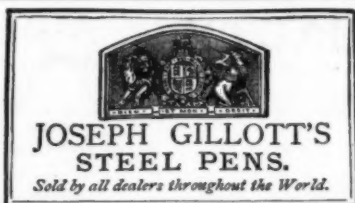
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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1873.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "HOBSON'S CHOICE," &c.

CHAPTER XXXV. AT THE PLAY.

It was about this time, I remember, that I suddenly encountered my old tutor, and—I am doubtful whether I should add "my old friend" or "my old enemy"—Mr. Bygrave. In any case my disposition towards him was certainly of a friendly kind, when I saw him again after so long an interval of separation. And then he was no longer my preceptor—I was no longer his pupil. We met now upon a different footing—upon equal terms. I had been to Doctors' Commons upon some official errand. I found him wandering about St. Paul's Churchyard—for he knew little of London—in quest of the Chapter Coffee House. He had, as he subsequently explained, an appointment there with the agent or representative of a scholastic establishment in the North that stood in need of a classical master. Mr. Bygrave had answered an advertisement, and had been duly summoned to attend, armed with such certificates of his qualifications for the post as he could furnish.

In appearance he was little changed, except that his thin whiskers were now somewhat grizzled, and his old gaunt hungry look seemed to have gained force. He was not, I judged, in very prosperous circumstances. Indeed, he revealed to me that he had been for some time without permanent occupation. He had held curacies in various districts, but only for brief periods. He confessed that he had not won the favour of his rectors, nor of his congregations. I found this credible enough. Even at Purrington—a most uncritical parish—Mr. Bygrave had not been popular.

I knew him at once; but I had great difficulty in persuading him of my identity. He viewed me with extreme suspicion. I think that for some time he took me for a pickpocket bent upon nefarious objects, or a member of the swell-mob—if indeed he had ever heard of that mysterious body.

"You're not Duke Nightingale," he said simply. "He was a mere child."

I had to explain to him that time was ever a flying, and that children gradually grew up—as a rule. Still he doubted.

"They'll be glad to hear at the Down Farm—my mother and my uncle, I mean—that you're well, Mr. Bygrave."

"Ah, yes. The Down Farm—at Purrington. Your mother and uncle—of course. Mrs. Nightingale and Mr. Orme. They were always very kind to me. I trust they're well. Yes, I remember them. And you're Duke, you say."

He did not believe me, it was clear.

I asked him to dine with me in Rupert-street, appointing the hour. He consented, upon my urging him, though he was greatly perplexed at the proposition. I reminded him of the studies I had pursued under his guidance. I told him I still possessed and cherished—which last was not strictly true, at any rate I had not looked into it for months—the pocket Horace with manuscript annotations he had given me on his quitting Purrington. Still he was incredulous.

He promised to come to dinner, however, and I induced him to write down in his pocket-book the place and the hour of meeting. That done, I conducted him to the Chapter Coffee House, which I felt sure he would never have discovered for himself, and there left him in the custody of a waiter.

I perceived with some little surprise that

the measure of awe and reverence with which, as a boy, I had once regarded Mr. Bygrave had diminished even to vanishing. I could scarcely credit that I now stood in no fear whatever of his disapproval; that he seemed to need my assistance rather than I his; that, indeed, wandering, lank, wan, and bewildered in St. Paul's Churchyard, he presented a figure appealing strongly to my sense of the ridiculous. And yet I found that I liked him now better than I did. He was associated with my early home-life, and in such wise was deserving of toleration and even kindness at my hands. That was my coxcombical view of our relative positions.

He was half an hour late in presenting himself in Rupert-street. He had lost his way it appeared, and strayed almost as far as Hyde Park. I introduced him to Tony—whose attendance I had taken precautions to secure—and set before him as ample a dinner as our favourite establishment could provide. I was glad to find that Mr. Bygrave's appetite was in excellent preservation. He ate with great avidity. His quick clearing of the dishes reminded me of his visits of old to the Down Farm, when my mother was wont to insist that the curate was starved in his Purring-ton lodgings. He mentioned, by way of excuse for his ravenousness, that he had eaten nothing since breakfast time.

He was, for him, in high spirits, which perhaps bore considerable resemblance to the depression of other people. He had it seemed obtained a promise of the appointment as classical master at the northern school. But he was far from talkative. With a young host's redundant bonntiffulness I filled his glass repeatedly. The wine flushed his pale, pinched cheeks a little, but did not much loosen his tongue.

Tony, I could see, was at first greatly amused. "It's quite a treat," he whispered me, "to see any one at once so learned, so dull, and so hungry." But the dinner was not very lively altogether. As a festive entertainment it might even be counted a failure. Somehow, sympathy failed to find a place at the board. It was not only that he was a man, and that we were comparatively boys. Mr. Bygrave retained his old inability to converse. He would rise to no topical bait, though our angling did not lack painstaking and good intentions. Even Tony's most zealous efforts were of no avail. My guest's appetite appeased, he sat dumb: exactly as I so well remembered his sitting, years back,

in the little parlour of the farm-house. Yet his dumbness did not disconcert him. He was quite content to be speechless, being assured, possibly, that his subjects of discourse were ill-suited to us, as ours to him.

He was as a library of which we did not possess the key, and which perhaps contained books we did not at that moment care to study, however excellent and precious they might be. In a state of desperation I proposed at last that we should adjourn from the dinner-table to the pit of Drury Lane. Mr. Bygrave, almost to my surprise, consented. He said that he had not been to the play since his undergraduate days. I thought this looked promising. Tony brightened; he had been rapidly sinking into a despondent state.

As host I paid for our admissions, overruling all Tony's objections to that proceeding. Mr. Bygrave was not, I think, aware that payment was necessary before entering a theatre.

I called his attention to the vast size, and fine proportions of the house. He inquired how many people it held. I said between three and four thousand probably.

"The Athenian theatre must have held between thirty and forty thousand," he observed. It was clear that he did not think much of Drury Lane.

"They could not have heard or seen much on the back benches," Tony remarked.

Mr. Bygrave explained to him how the cothurnus added to the height of the actors, while their flowing draperies enhanced the importance of their aspect; how they wore masks contrived to swell the intonations of the voice; and how brazen vessels were ingeniously disposed about the theatre to increase the volume of sound. He had not a doubt that all could see and hear perfectly; even the occupants of the back benches.

"Then it must have been terribly noisy for those in the front row," said Tony, affecting a remarkable air of innocence, which completely deceived me until I found him winking at me behind Mr. Bygrave's back. The suggestion that the representations upon the classic stage could be fairly described as noisy was not agreeable to Mr. Bygrave. He shook his head, but he did not pursue the subject further.

The play was *The Stranger*. I could have wished for a more animated entertainment.

"The actors still wear masks in pantomimes," continued Tony.

"Then I should have preferred a pantomime to-night," said Mr. Bygrave, simply.

"We don't find them very audible, though, when they speak in masks."

"The art of constructing masks is probably lost," said Mr. Bygrave, "with many other admirable inventions of the ancients. They were made of wood——"

"They make them now of pasteboard," interposed Tony.

"That accounts for it, probably. The old system was far preferable. The masks were made of wood encrusted, as Pliny tells us, in the first instance with thin plates of brass, but subsequently, it would seem, with portions of the stone called calcaphonos, or brass-sounding. By these means the voice issuing from the mask acquired extraordinary volume and sonority. They were of extreme beauty—aggrandised and idealised faces of the noblest Grecian form. They must have been wonderfully imposing."

"But rather heavy for the actors to wear. As it is, the poor fellows suffer terribly with their pasteboard heads in the pantomime. What they'd do if their masks were made of wood, and brass, and stone, I can't think."

"The Greeks were a superior race," said Mr. Bygrave. And then he inquired of me whether Kotzebue, whose name he had not before met with, was highly considered as a dramatist.

I informed him that the playwright had enjoyed at one time exceeding popularity; that his works, which were very numerous, had been translated into every European language, and been universally esteemed for their moving and pathetic character. But still I thought it was now generally held that Kotzebue's merits had been overvalued, and that his plays were in truth but tedious and dull productions. Upon the subject of their morality I did not think it worth while to enter. Mr. Bygrave was a clergyman, and could judge of that matter for himself at his leisure.

"The Stranger wants action," I said, with a critical air.

"I can't say I agree with you," he replied. "It seems to me that there is too much action. There is want of repose, indeed. In the Greek drama there was no action. Deeds of violence—such as murder—were banished from the Greek theatre, not because, as some suppose, they were too shocking for representation, but because they were action. All that should take place, or should be supposed to take place,

away from the spectator's presence. On the stage there should be absolute repose."

"No passion?"

"Not in its violent stage. Suffering may be exhibited; but not sudden conflicts of emotions. The play is divided into acts expressly that action may be supposed to go on, and time elapse in the intervals."

I felt that Mr. Bygrave would not be a sympathetic or appreciative critic of my tragedy of *The Daughter of the Doge*.

Altogether, our visit to the theatre was not very successful, except in that it had extorted a measure of speech from Mr. Bygrave. But Tony at last declared to me in a whisper that my friend's speech was more trying than his silence, and leant back and went to sleep. Mr. Bygrave continued his remarks upon the entertainment with repeated reference to the characteristics of the classical theatre. He agreed that the language of the play was too prosy, colloquial, and commonplace. The drama, he maintained, should have its own peculiar phraseology. Solemn, massy, remote from ordinary use, exalted, almost archaic. And he found grave fault with the players. They were too restless, and they grimaced overmuch. He would have had them still and expressionless; and thereupon he returned to the advantages of masks. They concealed natural irregularities and defects; substituting an unchanging perfectness of contour. They varied according to the characters represented. The face of Niobe was intensely mournful; Medea's announced her vengeance; valour was depicted on the mask of Hercules; on that of Ajax, transport and fury. How portray change of feeling, did I ask? It was not needed. Or the actor could avert his face, or muffle it in his robe. What could be more awfully impressive? Of the chorus, and of its solemn office to point the moral of the scenes enacted, and to guide and interpret the sympathies of the audience, he had much to say. He regretted that no chorus had appeared in *The Stranger*. He had looked, he said, for its rich, passionate, and religious music, accompanied by its solemn and symbolic dances—the strophe and the antistrophe—full of mysterious and inscrutable meaning.

"Danced, did they?" said Tony, waking up. "The chorus does that in *Macbeth*. It always strikes me as rather comical."

Abruptly, Mr. Bygrave concluded his instructive observations.

"It was all very clever and improving, no doubt," Tony remarked to me afterwards; "but you know, old fellow, we didn't go to Drury Lane to hear that. The Stranger wasn't very cheerful, but as for your friend—well, he's your friend, and a very good fellow of course—so I'll say no more about him."

"And you're little Duke Nightingale!" said Mr. Bygrave, as I parted from him under the shadow of Drury Lane's portico. He was still unconvinced of my identity.

I never saw him again. He died some years later, as I heard, of small-pox, which had broken out furiously in the school in the North. Poor Bygrave! He declined to avail himself of the opportunity for escape which was proffered him, and remained at his post tending his pupils to the utmost of his power, until he was himself stricken down. A tablet to his memory was placed upon the wall of the district church. The inscription was in English; a fact to be regretted perhaps. He would so much have preferred Greek. But in that case his merits and his sad fate would not have been made known to nearly so many. Poor Bygrave!

Arrived at my lodgings, certainly sober enough, after the first entertainment I had ever given in the nature of a dinner-party, I turned to my pocket-book to ascertain of what funds I still stood possessed. A bank-note or two remained, I was glad to find.

Suddenly I discovered in an inner fold of the book a letter I had long overlooked.

It was the letter of which my uncle had spoken on the morning of my departure from home. I had forgotten all about it. Already it wore almost an old and faded look. It was sealed with black wax, and addressed to "Sir George Nightingale, Harley-street, Portland-place."

CHAPTER XXXVI. SIR GEORGE.

I WAS surprised and vexed that this letter should have escaped my attention so completely. But my uncle had said little enough concerning it, and in the excitement of my quitting the country I had not particularly heeded his words. I had not even glanced at the address of the letter, but, allowing it to remain ensconced in a safe fold of my pocket-book, had straightway forgotten all about it. Was the matter of any importance? It could hardly be. No reference had ever been made to it in the many communications I had since received from the Down Farm.

Who was this Sir George Nightingale? A relation, of course—my uncle had said as

much, I thought. But I had certainly never heard of him before. I decided that he must be a cousin of my late father's—cousin being a convenient term, comprehending various degrees of consanguinity. It had been deemed advisable that I should seek out this unknown kinsman and apprise him of my existence. He might not regard that information as of any worth; but on the other hand it was possible that he might exhibit a friendly disposition towards me.

Still it would be difficult to explain my negligence and delay in presenting the letter, which I took for granted was one of introduction. I consulted Tony upon the subject.

"Sir George Nightingale!" he exclaimed. "A relation of yours—and you have never seen him yet, never even heard of him? How strange that seems! Why I thought that everybody had at any rate heard of Sir George. My dear fellow, Sir George is a very great personage."

The word "swell" was not in vogue at that date, or Tony would probably have employed it.

"And he's a relation of yours?"

"So I understand."

"To think of your having any doubt about it! Of course he's a relation of yours. That explains many things. Your love of art, for instance."

"Sir George is an artist then?"

"To be sure he is. He's serjeant-painter to the king. He was knighted, I believe, at the last coronation. He's quite famous in his way—highly esteemed on all sides, especially by the world of fashion. He's a man of fashion himself. He is the portrait painter of the time. To be painted by Sir George is like presentation at court—evidence of gentility all the world over. He has the whole peerage at his beck and call. The most lovely women in the world crowd to him, imploring him to record their loveliness upon canvas—to bid their fleeting charms live for ever by the magic of his brush."

"A successful portrait painter?"

"Most successful. And you'd never heard of him! Your relation, and you've never seen him! Such is life. Such is fame. But a man is never a prophet among his own kinsfolk. I wonder the name never struck me before. But I thought of course you'd have mentioned so important a fact. Why Sir George can throw open the world of art to you. With his aid your success is assured, if you ever think of abandoning the law and taking up with

art as a profession. With your talent for it, too! Sir George Nightingale! Art runs in your family. These things are in one's blood, you know, and they will out. I always hold that one's forefathers are in the main responsible for one's follies, even for one's sins. And of course they should have credit for one's successes and good deeds. Origin is a mysterious thing. And it may lead to extraordinary and complicated results. I don't know much about my own family. My father was a doctor, however. What was yours?"

"I never heard. He died when I was very young. I never saw him that I remember."

"Just my case. But I know that he was a doctor. Now possibly—I say possibly, because I'm not at all sure about the facts—possibly his father was a lawyer, and his father's father an artist. I won't carry it further back. But that would account for my being possessed, temporarily, with a disposition towards those three professions. And my ultimate choice of a vocation would thus depend less upon my own volition than upon the question as to whether the influence of my father, my grandfather, or my great-grandfather predominated in my nature. It's really an interesting inquiry. Then again the influence of the mother and her progenitors has to be taken into account. You see it's a wide subject."

"My mother was a farmer's daughter," I observed, "but the fact didn't induce me to take very kindly to farming."

"Perhaps not. Still you did take to it for a time, and thought you liked it. That bears out my argument. My own case exactly. You were governed for a time by the influence, say, of your maternal grandfather. Then a stronger influence intervened, and you turned towards the law. It may be that your father was a lawyer. You say you don't know what he was. Why not a lawyer?"

"I think I should have heard of it if he'd been a lawyer."

"Depend upon it there's been a lawyer in your family at some time or other."

I could not gainsay this possibility.

"And now we have it for certain that a Nightingale, a relation of yours, your father's cousin, you suggest—and that connects them with a common ancestor—is an artist, really a famous artist. I wish I could feel equally certain that among my father's family, the Wrays, or my mother's family, the Moncks, there had ever been a painter so distinguished as Sir George

Nightingale. I should hail it as a guarantee of my future success. I should look upon my fortune as made. Yours, my dear Duke, I count quite as a matter of certainty from this time forth."

"But I'm not a painter yet, Tony."

"There's an element of doubt in the case, of course. Certainty is only a way of speaking. There's doubt in everything. To my thinking it's doubt and not love that makes the world go round. You're not a painter, as you say: meaning that you have not yet obtained universal recognition in that character. But that may come, or the world may some day acknowledge you to be the true poet and fine dramatist that I already know you to be. Or to go back to one of my original convictions—which I have not yet by any means abandoned—you may stick to the law and become Lord Chancellor. It will depend, as I said before, upon the influence brought to bear upon your nature by those concerned in your descent."

"But a man may strike out a line for himself, I suppose, which none of his ancestors had previously followed?"

"No doubt. Yes, I must grant you that. I must admit a phenomenal creature every now and then, though it's disturbing to my line of argument. For even if we trace back to Adam, he did not follow all the professions, though I have no doubt that he was a thoroughly accomplished and well-informed man. And if you care to set up for being a phenomenal creature, my dear Duke, I won't say you nay. Indeed, I think you're fully entitled, better than any man I know, to be that sort of exceptional personage. But I see that I must alter my own ambition in some respect. Even if I'm President of the Academy when you're Lord Chancellor, I shall hardly be able to claim the privilege of painting your portrait. Your relation, Sir George, will have an absolute right to accomplish that. And he wouldn't be likely to forego it. In decency I could not ask him to."

"You think that I should go and see him?"

"Of course you'll go and see him. You can't question that. He'll be delighted to make your acquaintance. Who wouldn't? Take my word for it, my dear Duke, he'll be delighted."

"But this unfortunate delay——"

"What does it matter? An accident—easily expressed. Beside, better late than never. It couldn't be helped. You've been busy—he's always busy——"

"He's rich I suppose, Tony?"

"Rich? My dear fellow he coins money. Every stroke of his brush is like printing a bank-note. He's the most prosperous portrait painter that ever lived."

"Tony," I said, after a pause, "I'll not go to him."

"Not go? Why not?"

"He's my relation, and I've never seen him, never heard his name mentioned until now. And he's successful and rich. If I go to him, to introduce myself to him, to tell him my name, and explain my situation, I shall seem as though I were asking for a share of his prosperity, imploring alms of him almost."

"Imploring alms? I never heard you say anything so illogical before. Nonsense. I'm sure you do Sir George, though I've never seen him, injustice—grave injustice. He'll be pleased to see you, proud of you, of course he will."

"But it's plain that all these years he has kept apart from me and my family."

"Why not? He's been living in London, and you have but lately quitted the country. How could you meet?"

"At any rate I'll write home first for instructions."

"Nonsense. Haven't they intrusted you with a letter to deliver to him? Your people at home have long ago made up their minds that you're on intimate terms with Sir George by this time. As you should be; as you will be."

"I'm sure they'd no notion that he was so famous and prosperous a man as you describe him."

"What difference does that make among relations—well, then, among artists? Art is a republic. Besides, you can but see him. You're bound to see him. If you don't like him there's no need to go near him again. Doesn't curiosity tempt you to see this great man? Thousands would jump at such an opportunity. He's famous, I tell you: the most distinguished portrait painter of the time. And this letter, it really belongs to him. You must deliver it. Really I never heard of such extraordinary scruples. My dear Duke, are you taking leave of your senses? Seeing Sir George will be an event in your life, a most precious experience. It may have almost a historical importance. Painters of the future may select the subject for illustration, and it would really compose and paint uncommonly well. 'First Introduction of Duke Nightingale to his Kinsman, Sir George.' In my mind's eye I can see such a work hung upon the line at the Ex-

hibition of the Royal Academy, and receiving extraordinary applause."

Of course, after this, there seemed no help for it. I went to Harley-street.

I found the house without difficulty. It was a stately, but rather sombre-looking mansion, with wide door-steps and entrance. Above the olive-green coloured double-doors, with scowling lion-headed knockers, rose an arch of twisted ironwork, converting the portal into a sort of metallic bower, with large extinguishers of a decorated pattern on either side for the convenience of linkmen, when such functionaries were in existence. A handsome yellow chariot with a purple hammercloth stood at the door.

I was admitted. Sir George was at home. I intrusted my letter to the care of a grave but polite servant wearing powder in his hair, and a dark livery, with black silk stockings. I was ushered into the dining-room.

Presently the servant returned to say that Sir George would see me shortly if I would kindly wait. Of course I would wait. I surveyed the room. It was handsomely but heavily furnished, and wore somehow a dusty and neglected look. Many pictures in massive frames hung upon the walls. I judged them to be the works of the old masters, those vague patriarchs to whom so numerous and unworthy a progeny has been attributed. But there was a deplorable absence of light; the windows were obscured by dense crimson hangings, and I could really see little of the paintings, except that they were very black and highly varnished.

It was a cheerless room, cold and grim, I thought, though really there was little fault that could be found with its fittings, which were, without doubt, costly enough. But it had an unused look, as I fancied. A dining-room in which no one ever dined.

"Sir George will see you, sir, in the studio, if you will kindly follow me," said the footman, softly, and with a deferential air.

A VISIT TO THE "SERPENT."

"LET us go and see the Serpent," said my friend, Herr von Whackenfeldt, Doctor of Law and of Philosophy, and Professor of Sanscrit and other Oriental languages at the University of Pumpernickel.

"By all means," replied I, "and let us picnic on the animal's back."

"Good idea," said the professor, "and don't let us have any ladies of the party. They are very charming, I don't deny it, but they are always unscientific, and as ours is to be a scientific expedition, that may involve hard work, which ladies don't like, and exposure to the elements, which disarranges their finery, we shall be better without them."

"Agreed," said I, "but we'll ask M'Tavish to come with us. He's a good fellow, speaks Gaelic, and is a capital caterer. And we three will make a day of it, and combine instruction with fresh air, novelty, and pleasure."

This edifying conversation was held upon the Corran—or strand—at Oban, the prettiest, cosiest, and, I may add, most beautiful little seaside town in the Scottish Highlands, and within a convenient distance for walking, rowing, sailing or riding, of some of the grandest scenery in Europe. Next day, the weather being delicious, and the outlines of the magnificent hills of Lorne and Mull standing out clear against a sky as blue as ever over-arched Italy, Greece, Algeria, or any other part of the globe, where blue skies are said to be the rule, and not the exception, we started in a neat little carriage and pair from Oban to Loch Nell, to visit the Serpent, and find out, if we could, all about him.

M'Tavish justified his reputation as a caterer. We had, thanks to his watchful and experienced care, abundant store with us—two cold fowls, a neat's tongue, a dozen of hard-boiled eggs (which no orthodox pic-nic should be without), biscuits, oat-cake, cheese, butter (and such butter as there is to be got in the Highlands the world cannot excel), together with sundry oranges, and a capacious flask of the "wine of the country." Water we did not require, as in Argyllshire, and all through the Highlands, there is always an abundant supply, derivable from the copious "burnies," or streams that trickle, or rush, or roar down the sides of every hillock, hill, or mountain in all the lovely land.

The drive from Oban to Loch Feochan and Loch Nell (between which lakes, but nearer to Loch Nell, or the Lake of the Swan, stands, or lies, or sprawls the Serpent that we had set forth to visit), is as variously beautiful as any one can desire to enjoy. It is but six miles, but such a six miles as only the Highlands of Scotland can afford; six miles of hill and glen, heather-tufted, golden and purple, musical with the voice of running waters,

disclosing every now and then a burst of the glorious sea, and a burst of the equally, or perhaps more glorious mountains, crowned in the far distance, looming purple, and grey, and green, and brown, by the triple peaks of Ben Cruachan—most picturesque of all the hills of the Highlands.

"I don't understand much about the Serpent," said M'Tavish, as we bowled merrily along. "Isn't it a myth, a hoax, a humbug, a dream, an absurdity, something 'got up' by the scientific folks to talk and maunder about?"

"Out upon you, Philistine!" said Professor Whackenfheldt, very emphatically, throwing away the end of his cigar, as if disgusted. "The Serpent of Loch Nell is one of the most remarkable remnants in Europe of a civilisation that passed away close upon two thousand years ago. The Serpent is no myth, but a relic of Druidism, the oldest religion in the world; and a grand and magnificent religion too. Please throw no doubts upon the Serpent until you have seen him, and heard what I have to say about him, when standing on his back, as we shall do in half an hour, or I shall be compelled to think you are an ignoramus, in spite of your skill as a caterer for a pic-nic."

"Tak' a dram," said M'Tavish, to allay the professor's wrath.

"I'll take a dram, as you call it," answered Whackenfheldt, "tempered with aqua pura. But an' you love me, express no disrespect to the Serpent till you can justify your disrespect by knowledge superior to mine."

They had their dram, and I had mine, tempered by a bountiful dash of the cold stream that ran down the hillside. M'Tavish prudently avoided all further discussion about the Serpent, for the professor's wrath was rising, and it was unsafe, or, at all events, uncomfortable to be the object of a disputation with him on any subject on which he had strong convictions. Thus fortified and mollified, we drove quietly along till we came to a turn of the road, and saw an inscription: "To the Saurian Mound."

"The 'Saurian Mound!'" scornfully ejaculated Whackenfheldt. "I wonder who put up that inscription? How does he know that there is what he calls a mound? And why does he call it the Saurian? Bah!"

The professor's bah! was very emphatic. He was evidently indignant.

"What's in a name?" said I. "We don't come here to quarrel about catch-penny inscriptions, but to see and judge for ourselves. Let us dismount and examine what there is to be examined, which I don't imagine will be anything very extraordinary."

"Don't be too sure," said Whackenfheldt; "don't jump to conclusions. But here we are. Shall we lunch first? or see the Serpent, and lunch afterwards?"

"Lunch first," said M'Tavish. "Fortify yourselves for the Serpent, and take him afterwards."

"The Serpent first," said I.

"The Serpent first," said Whackenfheldt. "Two to one, the ayes have it."

So we went to the Serpent, and found it to be a mound of earth, either natural or artificial, about ten feet high, three hundred feet long, and unmistakably serpentine in its form. The learned Doctor Whackenfheldt affirmed it to be a visible representation, formed by men's hands, two thousand, three thousand, it might be four thousand years ago, of that great mysterious object of the early worship of the fathers of mankind, the Serpent—a symbol of medicine and of eternity.

"The head of the Serpent," said Whackenfheldt, as we stood up and took our stand upon it, "is formed of a cairn of stones, which was opened in October, 1871, by Mr. Phené—the discoverer of this relic of the past—in presence of the proprietor of the estate of Glen Feochan, and several other gentlemen."

"And what was found? Anything, or nothing?" inquired I.

"A vault or chamber of huge stones, possibly intended for a grave, and some charcoal and burnt bones, together with a few charred nutshells, and a flint instrument beautifully serrated at the edge. Turn your eyes towards the lake, and you will see the serpentine form, ending in the tail, which points direct to the triple-headed peak of Ben Cruachan. Do you see?"

I saw. The mound was certainly of a serpentine form, and looked like a huge python, though I speedily began to doubt whether it were artificial, and whether it had not been formed by the action of the waves of Loch Feochan at some remote geological period, when the sea rolled its waters at the very basis of Ben Cruachan away to the shores of Loch Etive, and converted this corner of Argyllshire into an island, or a cluster of islands.

I suggested this idea to Whackenfheldt.

"It is possible that you are right," he replied. "Though if the supposition be correct, it is clear to me that Art built itself upon Nature, and that the Celtic Druids and their people converted the heap into a stronger resemblance to the mystical serpent than it originally possessed."

"Was the serpent an object of worship among the Druids? And was this particular serpent here represented—if serpent it be—not a place of sepulture?"

"The serpent was an object of worship, or rather was a symbol and representative of one of the multifarious powers of Nature which the Druids, in common with the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Phœnicians (who, like themselves, adored the sun as the prime source of life, and the only visible representative of the Deity), paid divine honours to—not as God—because they acknowledged but one God, but as emblematic of one of God's attributes."

"Isn't it odd," said M'Tavish, "that all the ancient nations revered or paid homage to, or otherwise considered the serpent a somebody? A somebody superior to man, or if not superior, a somebody that owned and possessed the world before man came into it?"

"Mr. M'Tavish," said the professor, "the question does you honour. The serpent inhabited this world before man. Geology shows it. Tradition affirms it. The idea percolates through all the ages, and has come down even to the Elizabethan age in England. Hercules made war upon hydras, pythons, and dragons; St. George, in the ballad, killed the dragon, and a very hard job he had of it; and Moore, of Moore Hall, a prosperous English gentleman, who might have hobnobbed with Shakespeare—or at all events with Chaucer—did he not slay, after a hard, and I should say a most pestiferous and pestilential battle, the famous Dragon of Wantley? Depend upon it, there is much yet to be learned about serpents; the very big serpents that infested the world before man came into it, and whom the first tribes and nations first feared, afterwards revered, and finally improved off the face of the earth."

"Professor," said M'Tavish, admiringly. "In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts. What you have just said, I have often thought. You are a great man. So am I. Let's tak' a dram."

"Joking apart," rejoined the professor, "a history of serpent worship and its origin, if truly and well done, would be a valuable contribution to the history of the human intellect."

"Write it," said I, "in fifty volumes."

"Bah!" replied he. "You jest at serious matters. The serpent idea is a great idea—somehow or other—though I don't pretend to have got to the root of it. Whence, for instance, comes the word serpent? The dictionary makers, all fools, or mostly so, derive serpent from the Greek *erpo*, to creep. Bah!"—(here the professor took a pinch of snuff)—"but *erpo* is not *serpo*. The old Oriental languages—of which our modern languages are the great-great-grandchildren—call the serpent *ob*, *oph*, *anph*, &c., and the Celtic languages, and Gaelic, fountain of them all, has *snaig*, to creep, the English *snake*, and *nathair*, a serpent, whence by corruption in English, a *nathair*, or an *adder*. But serpent is a word of more abstruse and recondite etymology. In the old Celtic, the child of Egyptian, Assyrian, Chaldean, and Phœnician, serpent resolves itself into *Sar* (lord or prince), and *Pian-tadh*, painful, or of pain, whence the adoption of the serpent by Esculapius, the great mythical physician of antiquity, as the symbol of medicine, the lord or conqueror of pain! Do you see? You do! Very well. If you have travelled on the European continent you must have noticed in all countries—and I think I have seen it even in England—the serpent set up as a sign, symbol, or ornament in druggists' shops, to notify that inside are sold the drugs that remove, alleviate, and conquer pain."

"Very good—very ingenious; I don't deny the theory, neither do I accept it," said I. "But how about the serpent as the symbol of eternity?"

"Easily accounted for," replied Whackenfheldt. "The circle—no beginning, no end. The creature has its tail in its mouth—a very early hieroglyph—perhaps the earliest ever drawn or imagined by man. But there is another meaning of the word serpent, or, as it ought to be pronounced, *sarpent* (in which pronunciation the vulgar are more correct than those who think they are not vulgar), which is *Sar*, the lord or prince as aforesaid, and *painntir*, a trap or snare—that is, the lord of the trap or the snare. You see how this derivation fits into the temptation of Eve by the serpent in Paradise?"

"Far fetched," said M'Tavish. "Tak' a dram."

"I'll take no more drams," said the professor, "until after lunch. If I cast my pearls before swine there is no blame to me for casting them, and no particular blame to the swine for not appreciating that which is beyond the swinish nature."

"Shut up, M'Tavish," said I, "and let us hear the professor."

"Well," said Whackenfheldt, "we'll leave etymology alone. We standing here amid a Druidical circle (we shall explore it presently), and on this obvious representation of a serpent, with its tail towards a triune mountain, must confess, if we be unprejudiced and earnest searchers after truth, that we stand upon a remarkable monument of past ages, whether that monument be wholly natural, wholly artificial, or partly natural and partly artificial. You will admit that?"

"I admit it," said I; "and, moreover, I admit that the Druids worshipped the serpent, after a certain modified form of worship, as the ancient Egyptians, Phœnicians, and Chaldeans did, and that by the serpent they typified both pharmacy and eternity."

"But how the blazes," said M'Tavish, irreverently, "did the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Phœnicians come here?"

"Peace, man! Peace!" said Whackenfheldt, with a majestic wave of his hand. "You might as well ask 'how the blazes' the English, Scotch, and Irish ever found their way to America. It is not further from Cairo and Babylon to Argyllshire, than from London to New York and Wisconsin. You don't suppose, do you, that the earliest nations of three or four thousand years ago, or longer, did not suffer from a plethora of population as we do in our time, and that the overplus had not to find its way, or die, into new regions, just as the swarming millions of Europe do at the present time? These early emigrants brought their religion, their laws, and their language along with them. You will admit that?"

"Certainly, I admit it," replied M'Tavish, "and are we all Phœnicians, Chaldeans, Persians, and the descendants of sun-worshippers and fire-worshippers?"

"Unquestionably," said the professor, with an air of triumph; "but let us explore the Druidic circle and the cromlechs. This is a remarkable place. This serpent is as old as the time of Moses, and it would be a pity to leave it without learning more

about it from personal examination. The guide-books have not got into it yet, which is an advantage, for there never was a guide-book that was not written by an ignoramus, or a copyist, or that did not lead people astray who trusted in him."

So saying the professor led the way to a cromlech—a megalithic chamber—which had evidently been the burial-place of a person of importance, a king, a priest, a bard, or a prophet among the Druids. A little shepherd-boy, who fastened himself upon us as a guide—a smart lad enough—volunteered the information that it was the grave of the great Cuchullin, the Ossianic hero. The dolmen, or transverse stone, had very recently been blown asunder with gunpowder, to form the raw material of a grindstone for some barbarian of the neighbourhood. As if there were not material enough for grindstones in this land of stones, without destroying a monument of remote antiquity! "Anathema maranatha!" was my exclamation against the perpetrator of the outrage. "Curse them in their kail, in their potatoes, in their meal, and in their malt, in their uprising and their downlying. Amen."

There was a smaller cromlech, which the shepherd lad said was the grave of Cuchullin's child, information at which Whackenfeldt turned up his nose, and bade the boy begone, with a sixpence to expedite his departure.

After an exploration of an hour of the very interesting Druidical ruins, amid which the Serpent stands conspicuous, we returned to the Serpent's head and had our luncheon, and listened to a learned disquisition from Whackenfeldt, on the religion of the Druids, on their sanctification of the serpent, and on the immense antiquity of the Gaelic language. "The Druids," said he "were the priests of the Chaldeans and Assyrians, who worshipped the sun and the heavenly bodies, and were the great astronomers of their time. Mountains were necessary for the observations they made of the stars, in the absence of telescopes and other optical instruments, and when, by the increase of population, and the failure or scarcity of the means of subsistence in their own mountainous country, they were forced to overflow westward into the flat country of Egypt, they built the Pyramids to serve instead of mountains."

"Whew!" said I. "A startling assertion. "Where is the proof?"

"There is no proof," replied Whacken-

feldt. "It is only a surmise, of which I defy any one to show the improbability or the error. As population increased in Egypt, as I have already remarked, it still flowed westward until it reached Gaul, Spain, and the West Highlands of Scotland."

"Where there are mountains, and to spare," said M'Tavish.

"Yes," continued Whackenfeldt, "and among all the mountains suited for the observations of a sun-worshipping and astronomical people, none were more admirably formed for the purpose than the triple-peaked Ben Cruachan, which we see before us. Here, in the midst of the Druidical circle of which the remains are scattered all round us, they found or made, I am not certain which, a representation of the serpent; and used it as a place of sepulture."

"With some occult or inchoate idea of the immortality, or the eternity, of which the serpent is the emblem?"

"Most probably."

"But what surprises me is that the ancients, who undoubtedly paid divine honours to the serpent, should have chosen so ugly a beast."

"And how the serpent came to signify medical skill, puzzles me quite as much," said M'Tavish. "In the island of Lewis, the serpent is called Rìghinn, which signifies a princess, a nymph, a beautiful woman, a queen, from a tradition of some ancient metamorphosis."

"Moses learned in Egypt that the serpent symbolised medicine; for when the Jews in the Desert complained that they had been bitten by fiery, that is to say, I suppose, by venomous serpents, Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon a pole, and it came to pass (see Numbers, chap. xxii. v. 9) that if a serpent had bitten any man, the man was healed if he looked upon the brazen image."

"What I should like now," continued the professor, after refreshing himself with a glass of claret, "what I should like more than anything else, would be permission from the proprietor of the estate of Glen Feochan to dig down into the vertebrae of this serpent, if he have any vertebrae, to discover whether other parts than the head were used as places of sepulture."

"The discovery has already been made," said I, "by Mr. Phené."

"I should like to make it for myself," replied Whackenfeldt, "and shall try the experiment some day."

From my knowledge of Whackenfeldt's character and tastes, I am pretty sure that he will keep his word. If he does, I hope I may be there to see.

GRAVING REST.

Oh! for the leisure to lie and to dream
By some woodland well, or some rippling stream,
With a cool green covert of trees overhead,
And fern or moss for my verdurous bed!

To rest and trifle with rushes and reeds,
Threading wild berries like chaplets of beads,
Letting the breeze fan my feverish brows,
Hearing the birds sing their summery vows.

Oh! for the leisure to lie without thought,
Upon the mind's anvil the ingot unwrought;
The hammers that beat in my temples at rest;
Calm in life's atmosphere, calm in the breast!

To loiter or saunter, to laugh or to weep,
Waken the echoes, or silence to keep,
With no human being at hand to intrude,
Or question the wherefore of manner or mood.

Oh! for such leisure to rest and to stray
In green haunts of nature, if but for a day,
Through leaves to look at the sky from the sod,
Alone with my heart, my hopes, and my God!

WITH A COUPON.

No expression of smiling astonishment was more often repeated to us at St. Grundy's than one which intoned as it were the phrase:

"Dear me! so you have never been abroad!"

The sting of the gibe was in its truth. And it certainly was mortifying that every soul in the St. Grundy hierarchy, from the bishop down to the cathedral beadle, had travelled, or, at least, had made what they called an excursion. Neither papa—the well-known Canon Perkes, whose faint tenor voice once reminded Lady Backwater "of the angels singing in the choir"—nor mamma, nor my sister Charlotte, had ever gone, I suppose, twenty miles from St. Grundy's. The fact is, that I, who relate this narrative, am the only one with anything like energy in the family. This is really signified in my name Augusta, which might seem at the first blush to belong to a person of languid temperament, but which my quick, sharp ways long ago shortened into the more serviceable Gus. Charlotte, always too dreamy, remained Charlotte; no one would have dreamed of cutting her down into Lotty or Char. Papa and mamma were, indeed, sadly helpless; he being too gentle, always looking at everybody through his glasses with a wistful benevolence that is quite provoking. Those glasses I really believe to be at the

bottom of his timorous, retiring way, for the frame is so delicate that the glasses seem to float before his eyes—without palpable support—their balance and structure are so frail, that half his life goes in nervously preserving them in position. Canon Blowman (who takes the bass at St. Grundy's, and gives out "The people that walked in darkness" somewhere down in the bowels of the earth) says that this criticism of mine shows "a nice knowledge of human character." It may be so, but the fact remains that the three are altogether too nervous and shrinking to get through life, and that I am the only one with a spark of energy.

Above all, I wanted to travel. Above all, I was dying to see Curebath. At St. Grundy's one might as well be buried in its old crypt for any chance there was of meeting suitable people—or, I have no false modesty in saying it, the suitable person that every young girl of spirit and proper ambition desires to meet. I am not one of those persons whose helplessness is but another name for selfishness, and who do not scruple being a burden and a charge on their families. Still I worked on that one idea, trying, as it were, to "educate my party," as they say in politics, but it was hopeless. A sort of terror of travelling weighed on my family like a nightmare—Mr. Perkes, I am sure, fancying that some box, or projection, would certainly dash against his perilously adjusted glasses, which he would never be able to bring successfully across the water.

At last I had begun to despair, when an event occurred which removed a chief difficulty. A maiden aunt shuffled off the mortal coil, though she had been so leisurely in her attempts at extrication that it seemed likely that she would remain in a state of permanent entanglement. This worthy relative left me and Charlotte fifty pounds apiece. I resolved, before the will was proved, that should be spent in foreign travel—every stiver of it, as Mr. Blowman was fond of saying. My plans were received with a sort of alarm, yet I could see that curiosity and interest had been awakened. I persevered, and had the pleasure of seeing that way was made. But there were appalling difficulties remaining. They shrank from the conflicts of travel, the bargaining, ticket taking, paying of bills, and discussion in foreign tongues, in which we were all, including myself, utterly deficient. However, by some interference, this obstacle was also to be

removed in the happiest and most satisfactory way.

Mr. Blowman had been to town to see a spinster cousin, who admired his underground voice vastly, and to whom he paid a visit regularly every half-year. He always came to us on his return to relate his adventures, which were of the most entertaining kind. On this evening he was more than usually excited. He was going away for his health. The doctor had ordered Curebath, and "the spinster," as I always called her, had behaved in the most liberal style. "She says," continued Mr. Blowman, "that I must take care of my voice, and that she will take care of me. How I wish that we were all going to Curebath!"

The feebly organised members of the family looked at each other wistfully. In their hearts they wished they were going to Curebath. But my father thought of the delicate balance of his glasses, and shook his head. "The worry," he murmured, "and the hurry, the paying the bills, and the fuss at the railway offices! I never could get through it."

"Exactly my view," said Mr. Blowman, eagerly. "I have never travelled either, and should be like a child among the foreigners. So my spinster said. And——"

"And was she so very liberal?" said my mother, faintly. "Was it a handsome present, if I might ask?"

"She did not give me a halfpenny, nothing that I could jingle on a tombstone, or even—for I have too much respect for my cloth to be seen so engaged—upon some more becoming gaming-table."

"Some Bank of England notes would save you from employing your time in such a pastime," said I, a little smartly. "Her benefaction I suppose took that shape."

"Not got it yet," said he, humorously. "I mean the solution. No, I'm not to have any cash. Yet she pays all expenses. See here," he said, pulling out two little books.

"Not tracts?" I said, scornfully.

"No," he said, "though I am to give them away piecemeal. They are the talismans, or talismen. In short, they are coupons."

"Coupons, what are they?" We all looked at them with a mysterious curiosity, as though expecting they would change suddenly into precious metal or notes.

"You know," he continued, "I am methodical in my ways, and the moment I heard of the famous coupon system I

hailed it as being made for me. In fact the whole of human life ought to be transacted in coupons. It would save a world of trouble and anxiety."

"But," said my father, mildly, "you have not explained. What is a coupon? What do those things in your hand mean?"

"See here. London to Dover; no money or ticket, but merely tear out and present coupon. Packet ditto, T. O. and P., that is, tear out and present, coupon. (I abbreviate). To Paris, T. O. and P. coupon. At hotel, breakfast; garson, bill. Here you are, coupon. So with dinner. So with bed. Coupon here, coupon there. Coupons to the right of them, coupons to the left of them. Fire 'em off in all directions. And so you see you can travel, board and lodge for a month, be taken away, kept, and brought back, without putting your finger into your purse once the whole time."

We were enormously interested. Was there not something piquant and engaging in this ingenious subversion of all ordinary forms of human arrangement? There was, as he said, a beautiful simplicity in the system; and it was certainly the first successful attempt at doing without the root of all evil. The vulgar element was eliminated, and one could at last travel without losing all sense of romance. How we wondered, as he explained how the director of the system lived and directed in town, whence he despatched, every day and every hour, crowds of travellers to the ends of the earth, furnishing each with nothing but his little book of tracts. He then unfolded a sort of broad sheet or programme of the arrangements, in which, besides giving information, the founder chats agreeably with his patrons—rather was he not their patron?—tells them his prospects, what he is going to do, and what he has done.

"So there is the way it stands," said Mr. Blowman, rising, "and I am to be transported to Curebath by boat and rail, maintained there at the Golden Stork a fortnight, and returned to my friends, without any expense or trouble beyond offering a little slip of paper as I come or go."

This revelation made a deep impression. The seed was sown, the difficulties vanished of themselves. The system commended itself as something almost fascinating. Before the next evening all was arranged, and though my father naturally felt some trepidation as to the fate of his glasses, still the danger he felt was re-

duced almost to a minimum. We were to go with Mr. Blowman. To carry out the principle in its most perfect style, Mr. Blowman declared that "not more than a few shillings in cash" were to be brought by the party, just to defray the charges of cabs, portorage, and so forth. We should trust ourselves implicitly to our coupons, and, as we agreed, give the thing fair play. It should be the coupon, the whole coupon, and nothing but the coupon.

In a day or two the die was cast, or rather a post-office order was despatched to the coupon-founder, who by return of post promptly returned three stout little pamphlets, and one for each of a smaller little tract, each having a portrait like an enlarged postage stamp, which was to be in common for the hotels. We set to work, got on packing, and at last started, my father slightly tremulous about his glasses. But Mr. Blowman, who was to accompany us, liberally guaranteed their safety.

Everything was delightful and worked admirably. Coupon here, coupon there; up, down, everywhere, they were all graciously honoured like cheques. It was universally agreed that it was the most charming way of travelling that could be. We—that is, I and Mr. Blowman—heartily wished the principle could be introduced into all the transactions of life. Dover, Ostend, Brussels, all were strictly couponised; then on to Cologne and the Rhine, where coupons were administered largely. The only drawback was that our small cash for cabs, porters, and so on, began to disappear with alarming rapidity, and we discovered with alarm that it would not hold out to the end of the journey.

We were in great spirits, which we bestowed—that is, I and Mr. Blowman—liberally on a dry, elderly, wiry-haired Briton, one of the true type we all know, who has the air of taking his bank abroad with him. That sort of commercial superiority is really unendurable, and we noticed that he smiled contemptuously as the guard came in and tore out our coupons.

"You find all that sort of thing answer, I suppose?" he said.

Mr. Blowman answered him readily. "It speaks for itself," he said; "it is the one, the only system, and depend upon it we shall all have to come to it, whether we like it or no."

"I am fond of the old ways," said the Briton, "at least until the new ones are fairly established."

"That was what all the social Tories said when steam came in. We'd never have had a railway if those principles had prevailed."

"Perhaps so. I only wished to know how the thing answered. Have you found it satisfactory?"

We had all the ardour of neophytes, and answered. Had we not gone in for the thing thoroughly? Could we show a greater proof of our confidence than having embarked so great a stake in the matter?

"Look here, sir," said Mr. Blowman, "we are couponed through and through, over and over again. See this and this. Boat, rail, breakfast, coffee or tea, with eggs, all coupon; meat ditto, a separate or supplemental coupon. Dinner, bed, we are all coupon, sir. We deal with our fellow-man in no medium but coupons, and look here, I suppose the united contents of the purses of the whole party would not amount to the sum of five shillings. What do you say to that, sir?"

"It only seems to me that you have burned your boats, as the saying is, and that you are determined to give the system its fullest trial. Such faith ought to move mountains."

"There are always sceptics in every age," said Mr. Blowman, with spirit. "This is an age of scepticism."

"Not an age for putting all your eggs in one basket."

On this we all set on this stuck-up Briton, and, as Mr. Blowman said happily, "couponed" him with a will. I must, however, think he was tolerably good-humoured under our roasting.

"Perhaps I am old-fashioned," he said, "but, at all events, you cannot blame me for waiting. I ought to tell you that Curebath is full to overflowing now."

"We are independent, sir," said Mr. Blowman, "and are provided for."

The day passed over. Gradually our spirits began to flag a little, for we were growing tired. Papa and mamma both showed signs of weariness, and, I must say, pettishness; mamma wishing that "she was back at St. Grundy's." Towards ten o'clock we began to draw near to Curebath. The starched Briton was asleep. At last there we were! and the exiles of St. Grundy's, as Mr. Blowman amusingly called our party, found themselves set down in Curebath.

It was very bewildering—the strange town—the lights—the foreign language—the odd people; and I own, for the first

time, I felt my heart sink a little, and wished myself, as mamma did, again in St. Grundy's. Mr. Blowman, who had been appointed—rather he had appointed himself—director-in-chief and coupon-holder of the party—seemed to exhibit signs of despondency, and was quite helpless and bewildered. A number of German porters were clamouring noisily round him, I suppose demanding payment for the luggage. He was quite cowed, and came to us to the cab door.

"Give me some money for these fellows," he said. "I haven't a halfpenny left, not as much as I could jingle on a tombstone."

This poor jest he delivered with a ghastly smile.

"You know I have none, Mr. Blowman," I answered somewhat tartly. "You should have kept some for this occasion."

"How could I?" he answered as tartly. "What am I to do with them?"

Papa, in an agitated way, said:

"Offer them the coupons—they are received everywhere, you know."

"Stuff and nonsense," he answered, roughly. "They wouldn't take 'em, know nothing about 'em. What are we to do?"

It was embarrassing, and all his fault. Still it was really the only thing to be done. They might accept them. So he drew out a "breakfast with meat" coupon, and tendered it. It was received with a chatter and a howl. Mamma suggested, what oddly enough proved to be the only sensible course, that we should bid them accompany us to the hotel, where the host would satisfy them. This was explained to them by signs, and seemed to be cordially accepted with many a "ja! ja!" and Mr. Blowman assured them, in the same language, that at the Golden Stork they should be handsomely remunerated.

Strange to say, this was received with a chorus of rude laughter, and a roar of "Nein! nein!" It was growing intolerable. In a moment of rage, and seeing that Blowman was of no more use than an old woman would be, I bade the coachman drive on quickly, which he did, with a loud crack of his whip.

I felt that we were attended behind by our persecutors, but it was a release. Inside in the dark interior, Mr. Blowman and I fairly quarrelled. I said he ought not to have taken on himself the direction of the party, if he felt that he could not be equal to such a little difficulty as that. He said that, if I hadn't interfered, all would have gone well. It was not a pleasant

drive. We were now passing through dark streets; every one seemed to be in bed. I wished again that I was back in my own snug one at St. Grundy's.

We had stopped in a long dark street before a gloomy arch, with closed gates like a prison. There was a gold stork over the door.

"Here we are," said both I and Mr. Blowman, uttering an undeniable truism at the same moment.

The coachman got down, and voiced some unintelligible sounds.

"Tell him to ring the bell," I said.

Mr. Blowman pointed to that mode of attracting attention, uttering vehemently the words, "Bell, bell!"

He did not, or would not understand.

"Ring it yourself," I said, impatiently.

He was becoming more and more stupid every instant, but he got out, and did so. The man stamped impatiently, and poured out a volley of gutturals. At the same time the porter persecutors arrived, and, crowding round the window, gesticulated violently at the large gate, as if they were threatening the golden stork.

"They are touts for the other hotels," said Mr. Blowman, in his stupid way, "and infuriated that we did not go with them. What are we to do now?"

"Ring again, of course," I said, thoroughly disgusted with him.

Catch me taking an underground bass abroad again. Of all the spectacles of effete stupidity! He tried to ring the bell, but they interposed, and gesticulated more furiously still. They would not allow him to touch it even. It was growing serious. My mamma began to cry. Suddenly a gentleman pushed through the crowd. I stood at the window. With what joy I recognised him as our travelling companion, the starched Briton.

"I saw you were in some difficulty," he said, "so I followed. Can I assist you?"

"Oh do, kind sir," I said, in despair. "Get rid of these wretches."

He spoke to them in German, and a dozen voices, including that of the cabman, answered him. The wretches used their arms to point excitedly at the walls and gate, the coachman followed suit with his whip.

"It seems," he says, "that the proprietor of this hotel died last week, and it has been shut up. His heirs are not carrying on the business. It is going to be pulled down, and re-opened as the Grand Hotel of the Golden Stork."

A cry of despair broke from the interior of the cab. The coupons!

He spoke again to the porters. Again gesticulations.

"Not a room to be had in the whole town," he said. "The Crown Prince arrived this evening to open the new bath-house. All the other hotels are full to bursting."

"But we have our coupons," said Mr. Blowman, in his idiotic way. "They are money cheques; they must take us."

"I fear not," said he.

What was to be done? We had coupons, but not a farthing of money, nothing that we could jingle on a tombstone."

"Look here," said Mr. Blowman, imbecile to the end. "Here is a breakfast coupon, with or without meat; a dinner ditto, a bed do——"

"I fear they would be of no use to you," said our rescuer. "The only thing that I can suggest is this. I telegraphed to secure a room at the Eagle, which is quite at the service of the two ladies. The gentlemen must rough it."

What gratitude we felt. Our rescuer satisfied the porters, and we drove away from the closed Stork to the Eagle, Mr. Blowman being turned out on the box-seat to make room for our noble preserver. We spent a miserably uncomfortable night at the Eagle, but were told that we ought to consider ourselves lucky. And, indeed, we were grateful.

The next day, however, things brightened a little. The Crown Prince was going away in the evening, and comfortable rooms were given us. And such was the esteem in which the worthy coupon-issuer—who was not responsible for the accident—was held, that his little drafts were promptly honoured by the proprietor of the Eagle.

We shall never travel, however, with Mr. Blowman again.

TREASURE.

"But if you admit the supernatural, if you allow its intervention in the circumstances of actual life, what—I take the liberty of asking—what is there left for sane reason to do?"

So saying, Anton Stepanytch magisterially folded his arms. He was a ministerial counsellor in some department; and as he had a deep bass voice and italicised his phrases, he was considered by some as an oracle.

"I agree with you," said Monsieur Finplentof, the master of the house, in his small fluty voice, as he sat in his corner.

"I must confess I don't, seeing that I have had myself some experience of supernatural events."

This dissent proceeded from a stout and bald gentleman, of middle height and middle age, who had remained hitherto close to the stove without uttering a single word. Everybody stared at him, and there was a moment's silence, broken by Anton Stepanytch. "Really, my dear, sir, do you mean to tell us, seriously, that anything supernatural ever happened to you?—that is to say, anything not in conformity with the laws of nature?"

"I give you my word for it," replied the dear sir, whose name was Porfirii Kapitonovitch, ex-officer of hussars.

"Not in conformity with the laws of nature!" thundered Stepanytch, evidently proud of the expression.

"Yes, to be sure. Exactly as you do me the honour to describe it."

"Very extraordinary! What do you say to it, gentlemen?" The departmental ministerial counsellor tried to put on an ironical look, but his features rather indicated the presence of some very offensive smell. "Would you be good enough," he continued, "to oblige us with a few details of so curious an adventure?"

"You wish to hear what occurred? Nothing is easier. You are aware, gentlemen, or perhaps you are not, that I have a small property in the district of Kozelsk. There is a little farm, a kitchen-garden to match, a little fish-pond, little barns and stables, besides a little lodging—I am a bachelor—just sufficient to give me decent shelter.

"One evening, some six years ago, I came home rather late. I had been card-playing with a neighbour, but I assure you that I walked quite straight. I undress, get into bed, and blow out the candle. Fancy, gentlemen, that as soon as the candle is out, something begins to stir under the bed. What is it? Mice? No, it can't be mice. It scratches, walks, kicks about, shakes its ears. 'Tis plain; 'tis a dog. But what dog? I don't keep a dog. 'It must be some stray dog,' I say to myself, 'treating himself to a night's lodging here.' I call my servant, 'Filka!' He comes with a light. 'What's this?' I ask him. 'You're a poor creature, Filka; you attend to nothing! A dog has hid himself under the bed.' 'A dog?' says he. 'What dog?' 'How should I know? 'Tis your business to provide your master with pleasant entertainments.' Filka looks under the bed with the candle. 'There's no dog

there,' says he. I look too, and in fact there's no dog to be found. I stare at Filka, and he bursts out laughing. 'Stupid ass,' I say to him, 'when you opened the door, the dog shot out. You can attend to nothing. Do you suppose I have been drinking?' He was going to answer, but I told him to take himself off. I rolled myself up into a ball in the bed-clothes, and that night I heard nothing more.

"But the following night, fancy, the sport begins again. The minute I blow out the candle, he shakes his ears. I again call Filka. He looks under the bed. Nothing. I send him away, and blow out the light once more. Whew! the deuce! Here's the dog. 'Tis really a dog; I hear him snort, as he grubs in his hide after fleas. There's not the slightest doubt. 'Filka,' I shout, 'come here without a candle.' He comes. 'Well. Do you hear it?' 'I hear it,' says he. Without seeing him, I know by his voice he is in a fright. 'How do you explain that?' I ask him. 'How should I explain it?' 'Tis a temptation—a bewitchment.' 'Hold your tongue, with your nonsensical bewitchments.' But we both of us shook, as if we had the ague. I light my candle; no more dog; no more noise; nothing but me and Filka, as white as sheets."

"'Tis plain you are a man of courage," interrupted Anton Stepanytch, forcing a smile half of pity and half of contempt. "'Tis evident you have served in the hussars."

"I was afraid then," replied Porfirii Kapitonovitch; "but excuse my saying that I shouldn't be afraid of you on any occasion. But listen a moment, gentlemen. This game had gone on for about six weeks, and I began to get used to it. I put out my candle every night, because I cannot sleep with a light in the room. One day my card-playing neighbour drops in to dinner, taking pot-luck, and I do him out of fifteen roubles. He looks up. 'It is getting dark,' says he; 'I must be moving.' But I had my plan. 'Sleep here, Vassi Vassiliutsh,' says I. 'To-morrow I will give you your revenge.' Vassili Vassiliutsh considers, and remains. I order a bed to be made for him in my chamber. We go to bed, we chat, we talk single men's talk—nonsense in short. Vassili Vassiliutsh blows out his candle, and turns his back, as much as to say 'Schlafen sie wohl.' I wait a minute, and then blow out mine. And fancy, before I had time to think of it, the sport begins; the brute stirs, crawls from under the bed, walks

about the room—I hear his claws upon the floor—shakes his ears, and then, patatras! upsets the chair that stood by Vassili Vassiliutsh's bedside. 'Porfirii Kapitonovitch,' says he, and, mind, quite in his usual tone of voice, 'you have set up a dog. Is it a sporting dog?' 'As to dog,' says I, 'I have none, and have never had.' 'Not a dog? What is it, then?' 'What is it, indeed? Light your candle, and you will see.' 'Not a dog?' 'No.'

"I hear him try to light a match, fr-r, fr-r. All the while he was doing it the dog went on scratching himself with his hind-leg. The candle is lighted. Nothing! Vanished! Vassili Vassiliutsh looks at me, and I look at him. 'What's the meaning of this?' says he. 'The meaning is this, that if you put Socrates and the Grand Frederick together, they can't explain it.' And I tell him the whole history. You should have seen him jump out of bed, like a scalt cat. 'Put my horses to,' says he. 'I won't stop here another minute. You are a lost man, under a spell. Bring out my horses instantly.'

"I managed to quiet him; his bed was shifted into another room, and lights kept burning all the rest of the night. Next morning he was considerably calmer. While drinking our tea he gave me his advice. And I must tell you, gentlemen, that my neighbour is a man—a superior man. He brought his mother-in-law to reason in a most extraordinary way. She became as gentle as a lamb; and it is not everybody, you know, who can get the better of a mother-in-law."

"I see you are a philosopher," again interrupted Anton Stepanytch, with the same compassionate and disdainful smile.

"Philosopher!" repeated Porfirii Kapitonovitch, this time knitting his brows and twisting his moustaches angrily. "I don't pretend to that. But I can give lessons in philosophy, and good ones too, upon occasion."

All eyes were turned on Anton Stepanytch, in expectation of a terrible reply, or at least a withering look; but the ministerial counsellor merely changed his contemptuous smile for a smile of indifference, yawned, crossed his legs, and that was all.

"Well," continued Porfirii Kapitonovitch, "Vassili's advice was, 'Leave home for a few days, and go to the town of Belev. There is a man there who may assist you. If it takes his fancy to help you, well and good; if it doesn't, there's nothing to be done. Ask for Prokhorytch Pervouchine, and tell him you come from me.' I thanked

him for the recommendation, and immediately ordering out a tarantass, told Filka to drive me at once to Belev. For I thought to myself, 'Although, up to the present time, my nocturnal visitor has done me no injury, it is nevertheless a great annoyance, and, moreover, quite unbecoming a gentleman and an officer.' What's your opinion?"

"And you went to Belev?" murmured Monsieur Finoplentof.

"Straight, without stopping. I find out Prokhorytch—an old man in a patched blue vest, a tattered cap, busy planting cabbages, with a goat's beard, not a tooth in his head, but never did I see such piercing eyes. He stares at me fixedly; so; then he says, 'Have the goodness to step into the house.' House! a hovel; not room to turn yourself about in; on the wall an image as black as coal, and heads of saints, black, too, except their eyes. 'You want to consult me?' 'Indeed I do.' 'Very well; state your case.' And my gentleman sits himself down, takes a ragged cotton handkerchief out of his pocket, spreads it on his knees, and, without asking me to take a seat, regards me as if he were a senator or a minister. And, what is strangest of all, a sudden fright overtakes me. Before I can make an end of my story, my heart sinks down to my heels. When I have done, he says nothing, but knits his brows and bites his lips. At last he majestically and deliberately asks, 'Your name? Your age? Your parents? Married or single?' Then, again knitting his brows and biting his lips, he raises his finger and says, 'Prostrate yourself before the holy images of the pure and gracious bishops, Saints Zozimus and Savvat of Solevets.' I prostrate myself at full length, and, if he had told me to do anything else, faith! I should have done it. I see, gentlemen, this sets you a laughing, but I didn't feel the least inclination to laugh.

"'Rise, young man,' he says, after a time. 'We can help you in this matter. It is not sent as a punishment, but as a warning; that is to say, your friends have reason to be anxious about you. Happily there is some one who prays for you. Go to the bazaar, and buy a young dog, which you will never suffer to leave you, night or day. Your ghostly visitations will cease, and, besides that, the dog may render you a service.'

"You can fancy what delight this promise gave me. I made Prokhorytch a profound salutation and was going away, when it struck me that it would do no

harm to offer him my acknowledgments. I took a three-rouble paper out of my pocket, but he pushed back my hand, saying, 'These services are not sold for money. Give it to a chapel, or to the poor.' I saluted him again, bowing down to his girdle, and immediately set off for the bazaar.

"Would you believe that the first thing I see there is a man in a grey smock-frock carrying a puppy two months old, brown, with white fore-feet and muzzle. 'Hola!' says I to the grey smock-frock. 'The price of your animal?' 'Two roubles.' 'Take three.' He gaped with astonishment, thinking me mad, but I stuffed the note between his teeth, and ran off with the dog to my tarantass. The horses were quickly put in harness, and the same evening I reached home. All the way, I nursed the dog on my knees, and when he whined I called him Treasure! *Treasureouchko!* I fed him and gave him drink myself. I had straw brought and a bed made for him in my chamber. I blew out the candle. I was in the dark.

"'Let us see,' says I. 'Is it going to begin?' Not a sound to be heard. 'Come on. Do you give it up? Show yourself, rascal.' I was growing brave. 'Give us another specimen, if only for the fun of the thing.' I could hear nothing but the puppy's breathing. 'Filka!' I shouted. 'Come in, stupid.' He came in. 'Do you hear the spectre dog?' 'No, sir, I hear nothing,' and he began to laugh. 'Ah! you hear nothing now; nothing? Here's half a rouble, to drink my health.' 'Permit me to kiss your hand,' said the rogue, feeling his way in the dark. I leave you to guess how glad I was."

"And is that the end of your adventure?" asked Anton Stepanytch, but this time without his ironical grin.

"Yes, as far as the noises are concerned. But I have something more to tell you. My dog Treasure grew tall and stout; well set on the legs, strong square jaws, long hanging ears. His attachment to me was wonderful; where I went, he went; he never let me be out of his sight.

"One summer's day—and there was a drought unknown to the oldest inhabitant—the air was laden with hot flickering vapours. Everything was burnt up. The farm-labourers, like the crows, stood gasping in the heat, open-mouthed. The sky was dull, with the sun hanging in it like a red-hot cannon-ball. The very sight of the dust set you sneezing. I was tired of remaining shut up in the house, with the

outer blinds closed to keep out the heat; so as soon as the afternoon became a little less sultry, I started to see a lady-neighbour of mine, who resided about a verst from my house. She was very charitable, still tolerably fresh and young, always well-dressed, only just a trifle capricious. I don't know that that's any great crime in women; both parties gain by it.

"I manage to reach the flight of steps in front of her house, although the road had seemed deucedly long; but I was kept up by the thought that Ninfodora Semenovna would bring me to myself with cranberry-water and other cooling drinks. The handle of the door was in my grasp, when all at once I hear from behind a peasant's cottage the shouts of men and the screams of women and children. I look. Gracious Heavens! there rushes straight at me an enormous red brute, which at first sight I could not suppose to be a dog, open-mouthed, with bloodshot eyes and bristling hair. The monster mounts the steps, and, stupefied with terror, unable to stir, I am conscious of the rapid approach of some big white tusks and a red tongue covered with foam. But, the next moment, another solid body flashes past me like a shell from a mortar. 'Tis Treasure, come to my assistance, who seizes the beast by the throat and clings to him like a leech. The other gasps, grinds his teeth, and falls. I open the door and jump into the entrance-hall without hardly knowing where I am. I close the door with all my strength, and shout for help while the battle is furiously raging outside. The whole house is upside down. Ninfodora Semenovna rushes forward, with her head-dress all awry. I peep through the door, opening it just ajar. 'The mad dog,' an old woman screams from a window, 'has run off to the village.' I step out. Where is Treasure? Ah, here he is, poor fellow, lame, torn, and bleeding. People have flocked up, as they would to a fire. 'What's the cause of all this?' I ask. 'One of the count's famous dogs, gone mad. He has been prowling about the neighbourhood since yesterday.' We then had for a neighbour a dog-fancying count, who procured all sorts of breeds from all sorts of places.

"I run to a glass, to see if I am bitten. Thank Heaven, not a scratch, only, as you may guess, I was as green as a meadow, and Ninfodora Semenovna, stretched on a divan, sobbed like a clucking hen. You understand that. First, the nerves; then, sensibility. Good! she comes to herself, and asks me in a husky voice, 'Are you

alive?' 'I believe so,' says I, 'and 'tis Treasure who saved me.' 'What a noble creature!' says she. 'Has the mad dog killed him?'

"'No,' says I, 'he is not dead, but badly wounded.' 'In that case,' says she, 'you must shoot him immediately.' 'Nothing of the kind,' says I. 'I shall try and cure him.' At that moment, Treasure comes and scratches at the door. I open it. 'Good Heavens!' says she, 'what are you doing? He'll eat us all up.' 'Pardon me,' says I, 'that doesn't come on immediately.' 'Gracious goodness!' says she, 'is it possible? You are gone mad too.' 'Ninfodora,' says I, 'make your mind easy, calm your fears, be reasonable.' All to no purpose. She begins screaming. 'Get out, quick, you and your horrid dog.' 'That's it?' says I. 'Very well, I will get out.' 'Directly,' says she, 'not another minute! Be off with you! You are a monster. I haven't the slightest doubt the man is as mad as his dog.' 'Well and good,' says I, 'only give me a carriage. I don't mean to run the risk of going home on foot.' 'Give him a calash, a droschky, whatever he will, only let him be off at once. Ah, mon Dieu! What big eyes he has! How he foams at the mouth!' Thereupon, she ran out of the room, gave her femme-de-chambre a box on the ears, and fainted away. You may believe me, gentlemen, or you may not, but from that moment all intimacy between Ninfodora Semenovna and myself was broken off; and, upon calm consideration, I feel that, for this sole service, I owed Treasure a debt of gratitude which could never be repaid.

"I took Treasure into the calash with me, and drove straight home. I examined him, washed his wounds, and determined to take him next morning at daybreak to the midwife of the Efreim district, a wonderful old man, who mutters strange words over a glass of water with which, they say, he mixes vipers' venom. You swallow that and are cured in a twinkling.

"While making these reflections, night came on; that is, it was time to go to bed. So I went to bed, with Treasure close by, as a matter of course. But whether it was the heat, or the fright, or the fleas, or my own reflections, no sleep was to be had. I drank water, opened the window, played the Monjick of Komarino on the guitar, with Italian variations, all to no purpose. 'This chamber is insupportable,' says I. 'With a pillow and a pair of sheets, I have only to cross the garden, pass the night in the hay-shed, and breathe the fresh breeze

from the open fields. All the stars are shining, and the sky is covered with little white clouds which scarcely stir.

"Nevertheless, I couldn't find sleep on the hay any more than in my bed. My head kept running on presentiments, and what old Prokhorytch had told me. Impossible to comprehend what, in fact, is incomprehensible. But what does Treasure mean by whimpering and whining? His wounds, doubtless, smart. But the real impediment to sleep was the moon, staring me full in the face, flat, round, and yellow. She seemed to do it out of very insolence. The doors of the hay-shed stood wide open. You could see the country for five versts in front of you; that is, you saw everything bright and yet indistinct, as is the case with moonlight.

"I looked till I fancied I saw something moving, a shadow passing to and fro, not very near, then a little nearer. What is it? A hare? No, it is bigger than a hare. It crosses a silvery meadow in this direction. My heart beats, but curiosity masters fear. I get up, stare hard, with wide-open eyes, and feel a cold shudder, as if somebody had clapped a bit of ice on my back. The shadow rushes forward, like a hurricane; it is at the hay-shed door; 'tis the mad dog of yesterday. He howls, and flies at me with flaming eyes. But brave Treasure, who had kept watch, springs up from the hay. They fight and wrestle, mouth to mouth, bounding hither and thither, one snarling, yelling ball.

"All I remember is that I fell over them, and ran across the garden till I reached my chamber. After the first fright, I raised the house. Everybody armed themselves with something; one had a lantern, another a cudgel. I took a sabre and a revolver, bought when the serfs were emancipated, in case of need. Shouting, and hearing nothing, we ventured to enter the hay-shed, where we found my poor Treasure lying dead.

"Then, gentlemen, I began to bellow like a calf. I went down on my knees before the faithful friend who had twice saved my life, and kissed his dear head. When my old housekeeper, Prascovie, found me in this position, 'What do you mean, Porfirii Kapitonovitch,' she angrily said, 'by taking on so about a dog? Yes, you ought to be ashamed of yourself; you will catch your death of cold.' (It is true I was but scantily clad.) 'And if the dog has lost his life in saving yours, he ought to be very proud of the honour.'

"Without quite agreeing with Prascovie,

I returned to the house. The mad dog was shot next day by a soldier of the garrison, because his hour was come; for it was the first time that very soldier had ever fired a gun, although he wore a medal for saving his country in 1812. This, gentlemen, is why I told you that something supernatural had happened to me."

The speaker was silent, and filled his pipe.

"Ah, sir," said Monsieur Finaplentof, "no doubt you led a holy life, and this was the recompense of—" He stopped short, observing that Porfirii Kapitonovitch's eyes grew smaller and his mouth broader, as if irresistibly tempted to laugh.

"But if you once admit the supernatural," insisted Anton Stepanytch, "if you once allow its intervention in the circumstances of actual life, so to speak, what is there left for sane reason to do?"

Nobody could find a suitable reply.

Such is an abbreviated upshot of Tour-quénéff's Dog, which occupies but a very small space in the *Nouvelles Muscovites*, done into French partly by Prosper Mérimée, and partly by the Russian author himself.

NO ALTERNATIVE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DENIS DORNE," &c.

CHAPTER XIV. BY THE LEETH FOR THE LAST TIME.

THERE seemed no probability, as far as human foresight could reach, of Mrs. Devenish and Mabel coming to an end of the record of that ball. They perused the two long columns of the names of those happy ones who had attended it, carefully, and then went back and made long pauses over special persons, and related circumstantially to one another details (with which they were both already familiar) concerning them. They "wondered" that So-and-so hadn't married. They wondered even more that some other So-and-so had. For the first time since her marriage Mrs. Devenish allowed herself to experience a sense of relief at her husband being out of the room. Had he been there she would have checked the interest, and hidden the paper, and deprived herself of the womanly delight of raking over the ashes of the dear dead past.

For it was a delight to her, though some of these same ashes scorched her a good deal. Even she was obliged to admit that the bygone days had been better than these. She had not prized her freedom very

highly while she had it. She had been a pretty, happy, flattered young widow with two girl-children, whom she adored in those days, and she had always been sighing for those days to be over, and she free to show the love and devotion she felt for Mr. Devenish. That blessed privilege had been hers for many years now, and on the whole it was not surprising that she should give a sigh to the memory of the other times.

So she pondered over the paper, and chatted with Mabel, and never regarded Harty's dumbness, or the brevity with which Jack Ferrier responded to any chance remark from his future sister-in-law.

Mabel was delighted with the new masculine element which was about to be introduced into the family. She had saved her conscience by administering that one rebuke to Harty about the latter's fickleness, and now felt at liberty to rejoice in her heart about what she could but feel to be an excellent thing. It was delightful to her that Harty should be going to marry a nice fellow, for whom she (Mabel) had not a particle of affection, more than she would have been ready to proffer to ninety-nine out of a hundred other men, who might have presented themselves as candidates for the office of her brother-in-law. And it was more than delightful to her that Harty could now never marry Claude.

All this balmy satisfaction with things as they were, made her very gracious, and frank, and agreeable to Jack Ferrier. At the same time she was very unobservant of him, and of his moods. She did not see now that he was constrained, disinclined to speak, awkward, miserable. She only thought that he, having secured his own happiness, might be ready with a little information respecting Claude and Claude's movements. "But most people are selfish," she thought, with a sigh of regret for the prevalence of that besetting sin of mankind. And then she having exhausted her own interest in the ball, asked him:

"How are they at the Court? What is going on there?"

"Nothing," he answered, briefly. He did so hope to avoid all mention of Claude, until he had had that explanation with Harty which should end all things between them.

"How is Mr. Powers?" Mabel persisted; "we haven't seen him for some time."

"He's very well, I believe," Jack answered unwillingly, and, as he said the two last words, Harty winced and looked up.

"You believe; don't you know?" she asked.

"He left the Court yesterday morning for town; he was very well then."

"Left the Court—not for good?" Mrs. Devenish exclaimed.

"Left the Court so suddenly, how odd," Mabel cried. But Harty merely looked down at the table again, and said never a word. The friends had come to an open explanation about her; Claude had denounced her as the shallow-hearted, fickle, foolish woman she must appear to be in his eyes, and Jack had taken his friend's view of her, she thought, and she heaved one short, strong sigh of determination to make no appeal against it all, for was she not rightly served?

"How very odd," Mabel repeated, presently, in an abstracted mood; "he'll soon be back I suppose?" she added, anxiously.

"I can't say. I didn't see him before he left," Jack replied, curtly. Mabel's curiosity on the subject of Claude seemed to be such an utterly idle, futile thing, that Jack Ferrier could hardly constrain himself to gratify it.

Mrs. Devenish felt her bosom filling with wifely hopes that Claude might indeed be gone for good. If he were, a sense of peace and freedom might once more relax the peevish brow of her lord and master.

"It seems a pity that a young man with no ties, and who is so fond of travel, should shut himself up in a place like Dillsborough," she said, softly. "I for one should be glad to hear that Mr. Powers was not coming back."

She looked questioningly at Jack Ferrier as she spoke. But he was engrossed with the trouble that was lying straight in his path, and so had neither time nor inclination to assuage her lesser one.

"I can give you no more information about Claude than I have given already," he said, and with that meagre crumb of comfort Mrs. Devenish was fain to be content. Presently she took it away to offer to her husband, and at the same time Mabel thought she would go over and give the "latest information" to Agnes Greyling, and so at last Harty and Jack were alone.

He felt with a thrill that righteous, justifiable as his decision against her was, he would be very weak in that woman's hands if she brought that strange, subtle, undefinable power of hers to bear upon him now. A mere beauty spell would have been far more easily broken, he half unconsciously recognised, as he gazed at the girl whose strength lay in the wonderful expression that made hers a more danger-

ous face than that of a Venus. He did not attempt to define the "reason why" she could wield the winning power so well, but he knew that she had it.

Could he give her up? How could he ever say the words that would make his intention clear to her? Even as he hurriedly asked himself these questions, or rather let those thoughts rush through his mind, she spoke.

"You've come to make an end of what only began the day before yesterday? I think you're so right," she said, speaking very distinctly, but without the faintest touch of defiance or indifference in her tone.

"Let me speak," he said, starting up, not knowing in the least now what he really wished to say, or ought to say, only feeling that come what would he could not be cruel to this girl, who seemed so ready to place the knife in her own heart, though she made no pretence of its not hurting her.

"No, no," she interrupted, stepping back from him, making no movement with the pliant little hands—hands that he had pictured wreathing themselves about his arms. "No, no, Jack; you'd say something now that you didn't come to say; what you meant to do when you came in was the right thing, and you shall do it."

"Let me tell you what I have thought. I would give the world to hear you say something that would make me feel you had done yourself injustice. Harty, come to me—speak to me—"

"That I may hear over again your reasons for doing what is right! Oh, Jack, be satisfied as things are. I know what I am, and I know what you think of me, and I tell you I feel you're right; let it end here without another word."

"Harty, has this been nothing to you that you can make it all end in a moment?" he asked, forgetting for the moment that it had been his set purpose to make it end at once when he came in.

"Never mind what it has been to me," she said, impatiently. "You're right, I tell you, to break it off now at once; all I ask is, don't give me reasons for it, because I know them all, and they—do—sting, Jack—though I know they're good ones."

Her voice broke with a dry sob—if she had only cried the end would have been different. But Harty had no taste for those triumphs which are won with tears.

"I'll tell you something else, too, because you're a good fellow, and will often feel sorry for me—if you had married me after hearing that I did what you think so hardly of, I should have thought less of

you than I do of Claude; now I can't do that—good-bye."

The gesture with which she held out her hand to him was so sudden, so definite, so final, that he found himself taking it, and echoing her last words, "Good-bye."

He drew her nearer to him, and bent his head down and lifted her hand to his lips, pressing it passionately, and feeling that he could not give her up; that he could not render up this right. It was a hand that seemed specially made to be kissed, this of Harty's. No flabby, nerveless, incapable, limp-fingered thing, but a little, delicately made, essentially feminine hand for all that—a tiny thing to sway a man's soul truly. Yet at this moment the idea of relinquishing all right to be the legal caresser of that hand was bitterly painful to him.

"Harty, Harty," he said; "we have both been too hasty."

She drew her hand away at this, and stood off from him.

"No we haven't," she said; "after what you felt when you found me out, we couldn't have married, you know; but Jack, I'm sorry you felt it."

There was one more brief "good-bye" exchanged between them, and that last farewell was harder than Jack Ferrier had ever expected it would be.

He went away miserably enough presently, anything but rejoicing in that liberty which he had come there determined to reclaim; and then Harty, with a mad desire to have it all over as soon as possible, went to look for her mother.

For the last two days poor Mrs. Devenish had been breathing more freely than she had breathed for years. Harty, the best beloved but most difficult to deal with of her daughters, was about to be removed, the mother believed, to a more congenial sphere, and this in a way that must be gratifying to any truly maternal heart. The girl was going to marry; to marry a man she loved, who had money enough to maintain her; to marry well, in fact, and to be a bone of contention in the Devenish household no longer. "I shall miss my child, but the relief to poor Edward will be incalculable," the mother avowed in the first half of the sentence. The wife spoke in the latter part. Mrs. Devenish bemoaned, from the very bottom of her affectionate heart, that antipathy which existed between her husband and Harty. But she could not blind herself to the fact that it did exist, and therefore the prospect of Harty's speedy marriage was a pleasant one to her.

And Harty knew all this by intuition, and admitted to herself that it was only reasonable that it should be so. But this full knowledge added poignancy to the pain she felt in going to her mother with the tidings of the dissolution of the scheme that had seemed so fair, and that had promised such peace.

"Well, dear," Mrs. Devenish began, when Harty came to her, "where's Mr. Ferrier?"

She asked the question cheerfully, pausing in her occupation of looking out some better glass and china that was destined to grace the dinner table that night in honour of the son-in-law elect. And as Harty answered, "He is gone, mother," a ghastly memory came back of a bygone day, when, with feelings for another man that were almost identical with those that were thrilling her now about Jack, she had gone to her mother with a similar story of being left.

"Gone! I thought he would have stayed to dinner," Mrs. Devenish said, looking dejectedly at the china and glass which would now go back unused.

"All the horrible old story will have to be told over again—the same humiliating theme with just a few variations," Harty thought, with a queer mixture of bitterness and amusement. The tragedy and comedy of it all were so very patent to this girl. It must not be supposed that because she was not blind to the humour, she was insensible to the pain.

"He is gone, mamma, and he's not coming back again to dinner, or ever," she said, softly. "Dear mother, dear mother! don't heap questions upon me just yet; I'm found wanting a second time; that's all."

The disappointment, the indignation for her child, the wounded motherly love and pride, could find no vent in words. In utter prostration of spirit, and despair of a brighter day ever dawning for them, Mrs. Devenish laid her head on her daughter's shoulder, and did what Harty would not do, wept bitterly.

"Do you remember," Harty went on, dreamily, "when I was a child how I used to hate that fable about the girl who counted the chickens before they were hatched, as she carried the eggs to market? It must have been a presentiment of what was to happen to myself that made me shrink from hearing of those smashed eggs I think. Don't you, mother?"

"I can't think," Mrs. Devenish moaned; "it's all too dreadful, too dreadful to be true, surely."

"All the dreadful things are true, if you observe," Harty replied, with a sigh. "Dear mother, it must be awful for you; you must feel as if you had brought a monster of iniquity into the world from whom all men turn eventually."

"Mr. Ferrier must be as weak as he is worthless," Mrs. Devenish cried, passionately.

"He's neither weak nor worthless," Harty said, flaming up instantly in his defence; "if he had been weak he would have taken my view of my conduct, and I didn't think so badly of myself at first; and if he had been worthless my worthlessness wouldn't have shocked him as it has."

"My poor child," Mrs. Devenish said, piteously, "you're crushed indeed. Oh, Harty, some of us owe you a debt that we can never pay."

What words can properly portray the misery this girl endured during the ensuing days? This sharp, stinging pain of being as openly left as she has been openly loved is one that is sacred to refined and sensitive and affectionate women only. If golden silence were only observed by outsiders about the possible crime and the positive punishment, it might be borne more easily and patiently. But outsiders invariably look upon this special subject as their legitimate prey, and worry it well. It is one of those miserable facts that cannot be kept in the dark. A rumour arises, Heaven knows how, that the match is off, and forthwith the beldame conjecture is rampant in the atmosphere that surrounds the unfortunate object, and she is speculated about and commiserated out of her mind, and generally compelled to take a colossal portion of her Hades upon earth.

The servants saw that there was something wrong that same evening. "Deadly gloom cannot settle down upon the drawing-room without the kitchen being duly cognisant of it. Our faithful servitors are far more alive to our joys and woes, and to the causes of the same, than we find it agreeable to believe at all times. And they never act the miser's part with any information they may surreptitiously become possessed of respecting their employers. They circulate it freely among their compeers; and as it is in the nature of vapours, however noxious, to ascend, it floats up into other drawing-rooms, and goes through no sort of purification in the process."

All Dillsborough soon looked askance at the young lady who had "so nearly

caught" Mr. Powers's friend, and a sufficiently depreciatory version of the story was current in the place before long. The one person who sympathised with Harty with the only sympathy that can be endured under such circumstances—perfect silence, namely—was old Mrs. Powers.

Six weeks had passed away since the closing in of that dismal day which had witnessed the farewell scene between Jack Ferrier and Harty. He had left Dillsborough, of course, was gone entirely out of their life, utterly out of their orbit, and no one had heard a word about Claude. The stagnation of feeling, the dulness of the mediocre routine, the terrible desolation that reigned in the house at the corner, was an appalling thing to them all. To Harty it was simply horrible in its intensity. After such lovers, and such experiences as this girl had known, to be left to herself and the memory of them, was a punishment far too ghastly for any of her errors. Heaven help the women who, having had these feelings called into life, find them suddenly hurled back upon their own heads, for neither man nor woman can!

One morning Mrs. Devenish appeared among them all with an air of constrained, harassed resolve that was a new thing in her. Harty saw that her mother looked at Mabel now and again, and seemed to gather momentary strength from Mabel's reassuring, approving glances. "What did it all portend," Harty wondered, lazily, and she felt miserably that it couldn't be about Jack, for he would "never have appealed to me through them," she thought, unconsciously putting them all in their proper places.

There always came a specially dreary hour in the morning in that household when the morning fuss was over, the breakfast cleared away, and the dinner arranged, and Mr. Devenish established with his newspapers in the most comfortable place that could be found for him. A specially dreary hour, because in it there was nothing definite to do, and no noise could be permitted about anything indefinite. This hour in the winter the girls generally spent in their own bedrooms "putting things to rights," or reading over the books they had read dozens of times before. But this day, just as Harty was getting herself away to this harbour of refuge, her mother stopped her.

"It's quite clear and fine, Harty; come out for a little walk with me, will you, dear?"

Harty stared; it was the first time since Mrs. Devenish's marriage that she had issued such an invitation to either of her daughters. The thought that she might be needed by "dear Edward," always kept her hovering near to him, even while he was skimming the cream off the daily news, and not thinking about her.

"Where shall we go?" Harty asked, as she picked up her hat and jacket; "not through the street; they all look at me as if they expected to see me perform an impromptu Ophelia pas in the public places; let us go down through the meadows."

So down through the meadows they went, talking about the beautiful green of the grass, and the pleasant warmth there was in the air, and the comfort it was to have such a "nice walk" so close to their own gate. Talking about everything, in fact, but that which was nearest to their hearts.

They got down by the slowly crawling Leeth at last, and walked along its banks in silence, each of them steeped in a relaxing flood of recollections. Harty clenched her hands tightly together in the kindly concealment of her muff, as she recalled some words which she and those others had spoken there, and her heart swelled with pain, and a despairing expression came into the clever eyes that saw so clearly how desolate was the lot of their owner. But still, though memory was making the silence so painful, she shrank from its being broken.

She had become so absorbed that she gave a perceptible start when her mother spoke at length.

"Give me your arm, Harty, I am older than I was, and not so well able to walk. Why, child, how nervous you are."

"No, I'm not," Harty replied, promptly. "I should consider myself fit for nothing but the grave with a vengeance if I got nervous."

"Good nerves are a blessing for which one ought to be humbly grateful, I'm sure," Mrs. Devenish said, devoutly; "poor Edward's get worse and worse; it's heart-breaking to see the change in him."

"I don't see any change in him," Harty said, uncompromisingly.

"Ah, my child, you are not his—well, you'll believe me there is a change in him, a very sad change indeed; and I feel convinced that nothing but a change of scene and society will restore him at all."

Mrs. Devenish paused, and to Harty's surprise she saw that her mother's tears were falling fast.

"Dear mother," she said, "what is the matter?"

"I have something to say to you, Harty, and my dread is that you may misunderstand me; yet loving you as I do, I ought not to distrust you in that way; I ought not to fear that you will do me the wrong of misunderstanding me."

"No, I won't," Harty said bluntly.

"It is this, my darling: Edward and I have talked it over, and come to the conclusion that we ought not to sacrifice his health by living here any longer; health is a precious gift, and we have no right to wilfully squander it. He ought to go abroad to a more genial climate, and I must go with him."

"Yes?" Harty said, interrogatively.

"But as he says, the dear thoughtful fellow, we have no right to drag you two girls about in the sombre train of an invalid."

"You propose leaving us behind you then, mother?" Harty asked, calmly.

"Yes, dear, with how much pain you will never know; but it's better so, it's better so, my child," the poor, driven woman faltered.

"Do you think I shall stay in Dillsborough, mother?"

"No, dear; I have arranged already. An old friend of mine is living at Margate. You have seen her, my dear, Mrs. Vernon, a truly sweet woman" ("An old wretch," was Harty's mental commentary), "and she, having a larger house than she requires, is quite ready to make a home for Mabel and you; and—and—I hope and think you will be happy there, darling," she added, wistfully.

For a full minute Harty could not speak. That separation which she had made such a sacrifice to avoid was being forced upon her now by the hand that was so dear to her. But she knew that her mother was driven to take this course by the point of a dagger that she was powerless to blunt.

"It must all be as you say, mamma," she said after that pause, and for her mother's sake she did strive so hard to speak cheerily. "All but one thing; you don't think I'm going to live with Mrs. Vernon?"

"My child! where will you go?"

"I don't know; not there."

"Oh, Harty! you would be so safe, so cared for—"

"I won't go," Harty interrupted. "Trust

me, mother dear, I'll be safe anywhere for your sake, and as for being cared for, I don't want that; if Aunt Ellen will have me, I'll go to her and teach her children the little I know myself; if she won't have me, I'll——" she hesitated, and her mother asked anxiously:

"What?"

"Be a circus-rider," Harty said with a laugh. "Mother, dear, let us go back now; you have told me the grim truth, and you're longing to be home. Does Mabel know?"

"Mabel knows, and has agreed to go to Mrs. Vernon's, and thinks it a very good plan on the whole."

"So do I on the whole; an excellent plan, and quite in keeping with the rest of my highly successful career," Harty said, bitterly. "When do we all go?"

"Next week," Mrs. Devenish said, timidly.

"That's good—the sooner the better; mother dear, there is a great comfort in the thought that you'll have an easier time of it."

"And Mabel likes Margate," Mrs. Devenish said, with a faint accent of hopefulness, "if only you——"

"There's Mr. Devenish looking for you at the garden door," Harty interrupted, and as her mother hurried on to announce that it was all settled, Harty turned round and stood by the Leeth for the last time.

"I'm four-and-twenty," she said to herself, "and may live forty years longer; what a mercy that I'm not like the river, doomed to go on for ever."

Now, though this record of her ends here, and though there seems to be a very despairing note in that last speech of hers, it must be remembered, for the comfort of the few who may have taken an interest in Harty, that such a nature as hers is sure to rebound in time. And also that the faculty of loving does not desert a woman even after two failures, at four-and-twenty.

END OF NO ALTERNATIVE.

Next week will be commenced,
A NEW SERIAL STORY,

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," &c.,

ENTITLED

AT HER MERCY,

To be continued from week to week until completed.

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